

PSIR OPTIONAL · UPSC CSE

EDITION 2026

PYQ Vault

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questions

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days

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years of PYQs

DAY 16

Indian National Movement · 8 questions

Every question carries a **Flow Snapshot** — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.

No PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 10 marks

Critically examine the Radical Humanist perspective on Indian National Movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 New Humanism → the individual is the end, society only the means

→ test = rational + ethical freedom, not independence alone

R2 Roy judges the movement incomplete → political independence ≠ real freedom → yardstick of reason, ethics, individual liberty

Body flow

individual-centred premise → collectivist nationalism suppresses liberty

→ Congress / **Gandhi**: emotional, religious, traditionalist mobilization, no rational-ethical awakening → distrust of parliamentary democracy / power-seeking parties → alternative: party-less, decentralized people's committees + compulsory education + purification of politics

Counter-view

Kaviraj: daring radicalism but a tragic loss of self-rule → party-less democracy impractical in a mass society → underestimates collective identities → presumes prior civic education

Conclusion routes

R1 freedom is more than a transfer of power → reason, ethics, individual liberty as its true content

R2 penetrating standard, impractical means → value lies in the yardstick, not the blueprint

The Radical Humanist reading of the freedom struggle grows from M.N. Roy's New Humanism. It places the individual at the centre : the individual is an end, society only a means. Roy found the National Movement incomplete, since political independence alone could not secure rational & ethical freedom.

Roy argued that collectivist nationalism suppressed individual liberty. The congress and Mahatma Gandhi leaned on emotional, religious and traditionalist mobilization. They ignored rational and ethical awakening real freedom needed. He distrusted parliamentary democracy as breeding power-seeking parties.

He proposed a party-less, decentralized democracy of people's committees, with compulsory education and the purification of politics.

According to Sudipto Kaviraj, this reconceptualization was astonishingly radical however tragically unable to secure the self-rule it sought.

Party-less democracy is hard in a mass society. It underestimates collective identities and presumes wide civic education before any restructuring. However, it reminds us that real freedom means more than a transfer of power.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 10 marks

The success of Mahatma Gandhi lay in transforming both political and non-political movements into a unified nationalist movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 pre-Gandhi nationalism = elite + constitutional debate → success = dissolving the political / social divide

R2 real achievement = fusing political and non-political into one movement → elite politics turned mass

Body flow

Champaran / Kheda / Ahmedabad fuse agrarian + industrial grievance with the freedom struggle → peasants & workers enter politics → political goals (Swaraj, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience) joined with a non-political programme (khadi, Swadeshi, anti-untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, moral self-discipline) → continuity of means & ends; freedom without ethical self-rule incomplete → **Pantham's** integral democracy (private morality + public freedom) → **Bipan Chandra's** mass-based movement with a coherent strategy

Counter-view

Ambedkar & M.N. Roy: this very integration restrained radical social / caste-class transformation

Conclusion routes

R1 success lay in integration, not mere mobilization → political, social, economic, moral energies fused into a single nationalism

R2 unity of political and non-political = the distinctive Gandhian achievement → elite politics became a mass movement

Before Mahatma Gandhi, the national movement was largely confined to an educated elite debating constitutional reform. His success lay in dissolving the line between political agitation and social reconstruction.

Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad showed the fusion. Agrarian and industrial grievances were drawn into the freedom struggle, bringing peasants and workers into politics for the first time. Alongside the political goals of Swaraj, Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience, Gandhi made Khadi, Swadeshi, the removal of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity and moral self-discipline part of nationalism itself. For him, political freedom without ethical self-rule was incomplete; means and ends had to remain continuous.

Thomas Pantham calls this as integral democracy, joining private morality with public freedom. Bipan Chandra saw a mass-based movement carried by a coherent strategy.

Critics such as B.R. Ambedkar and M.N. Roy argues that this integration restrained radical social change. However, Gandhi's achievement was integration – political, social, economic and moral energies fused into a single nationalism.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Dalit perspective on Indian national movement. Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes **R1** national movement not judged by anti-colonial unity alone → real test = social emancipation

R2 Dalit lens reframes 'freedom' → political *Swaraj* meaningless without social equality

Body flow **Ambedkar**: no freedom while people remain socially enslaved → political democracy minus social democracy = contradiction → annihilation of caste as the core of nationhood → Congress upper-caste dominated / 'Brahmin-Baniya' → independence placed above caste reform → separate electorates opposed → Poona Pact compromise → **Panikkar**: disjunction between political and social-cultural struggle → **Omvedt**: anti-caste movement more democratic and 'nationalistic' than the elite Congress

Counter-view perspective not anti-national → **Gaikwad**: a rejection of elite hegemony, not of the nation

Conclusion routes **R1** asks 'freedom for whom?' → no *Swaraj* without social equality
R2 Bahishkrit Bharat → Prabuddha Bharat → freedom complete only with social equality

For the Dalit perspective, the national movement could not be judged by anti-colonial unity alone. Its real test was social emancipation. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued that a country cannot be free if its people remain socially enslaved and that political democracy without social democracy is a contradiction.

He therefore saw annihilation of caste, not merely transfer of power, as the heart of genuine nationhood. From this view, Congress appeared upper-caste dominated. Ambedkar called it a "Brahmin - Baniya" party. He criticises congress for placing independence above caste reform, opposing separate electorates and conceding only through the Poona pact.

According to K.N. Panikkar, the movement's limitation lay in the disjunction between political and social-cultural struggle.

Gail Omvedt argues treating the anti-caste movement as more consistently democratic and more "nationalistic", than the elite-controlled Congress.

But the perspective is not anti-national. As S.N. GaiKwad views, Ambedkar rejected elite hegemony, not the nation itself. It asks freedom from whom, and whether Swaraj can exist without social equality - seeking to convert Bahishkrit Bharat into Prabuddha Bharat.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 20 marks

National movement in India was anti-imperialist and increasingly radical in its socio-economic and political programmes. Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 anti-imperialist from the start → British rule seen as exploitative and alien

R2 constant core, deepening trajectory → political demand and socio-economic content both hardened over time

Body flow

Moderate drain critique (**Naoroji**) → Extremist rejection of colonial legitimacy + *Swaraj* (**Tilak**) → *Swadeshi* as mass economic anti-imperialism → Gandhian mass struggle (Non-Cooperation / Civil Disobedience / Quit India) → Lahore 1929 / *Purna Swaraj* (political radicalisation) → Russian Revolution → socialist turn (**Nehru**, **Bose**, Congress Socialist Party) → HSRA anti-capitalist / anti-feudal → Karachi Resolution 1931 (rights + economic programme) → Kisan Sabhas / trade unions (class enters nationalism)

Counter-view

radical in ideals, cautious in strategy → Congress hesitant before landlordism → class adjustment over class war

Conclusion routes

R1 anti-imperialism the constant; radicalism the trajectory, in both goal and programme

R2 revolutionary in social ambition → fuller social transformation deferred to the Constitution

The Indian national movement was anti-imperialist from its beginning. It identified British rule as both exploitative & alien. What changed across its phases was not this core but its depth.

The political demand hardened from reform to complete independence. The socio-economic content widened from elite critique to the questions of land, labour and rights.

Anti-imperialism took intellectual shape in the moderate economic critique. Dadabhai Naoroji's drain theory exposed colonial exploitation and the poverty it caused. The extremists rejected colonial legitimacy outright. B.G. Tilak declared, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it". The Swadeshi movement converted this anti-imperialism into a mass economic programme of boycott and indigenous industry.

Mahatma Gandhi turned protest into mass struggle through Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India. Politically, the demand became radical at Lahore in 1929, where Congress adopted Poona Swaraj. Socially, the Russian Revolution pushed Congress leftward.

J.L. Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose linked freedom with socialism and the Congress Socialist Party tried to radicalize Congress from within. Revolutionaries moved the same way, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association tying independence to anti-capitalist and anti-feudal goals. The Karachi Resolution of 1931 bound political freedom to fundamental rights and an economic programme protecting workers and peasants. Kisan Sabhas and trade unions brought class firmly into nationalism.

However, this radicalism was stronger in ideals than in strategy. Congress hesitated before landlordism & preferred adjustment. The movement was thus revolutionary in social ambition, though the task of social transformation passed to the constitution.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

Comment on the role of Socialists in Indian national movement in 150 words.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 socialism enters in the 1920s–30s → Russian Revolution + post-war distress + post-Non-Cooperation disillusionment → freedom gains economic / class content

R2 nationalism so far mainly political → socialists add the class question → liberation tied to equality

Body flow

origins (Russian Revolution, distress, disillusionment) → within Congress: **Nehru** + **Bose** → CSP 1934 (**JP**, **Narendra Deva**, **Lohia**) radicalize from within → Kisan Sabha + trade unions → freedom linked to workers + peasants + equality → social base widened → critique of **Gandhi** (class harmony, trusteeship, class contradiction) → underground role in Quit India

Counter-view

internal divisions + weak organization + doctrinal conflict → could not displace the Gandhian leadership

Conclusion routes

R1 limited in their own time, decisive in the long run → influence continued in planning, public sector, land reform, DPSP

R2 socialists made nationalism socially radical → freedom and equality joined as a lasting legacy

Socialism entered Indian nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. It was shaped by the Russian Revolution, post-war economic distress and disillusionment after Non-Cooperation. It gave the freedom struggle a clear economic and class content, linking political liberation with the demand for equality.

Within the Congress, J.L. Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose gave Socialist ideas a strong place. The Congress Socialist Party (1934), led by Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva and Ram Manohar Lohia, sought to radicalize the Congress from within rather than break it. Through the All India Kisan Sabha and trade union mobilization, socialists connected freedom with worker's rights and peasant struggles, widening the movement's social base.

They criticized Gandhian class harmony and trusteeship for neglecting class contradiction. It led much of the underground resistance during the Quit India Movement.

Internal divisions, weak organization and doctrinal conflict limited the socialists and they could not displace the Gandhian leadership. However, their influence continued after independence – in planning, the public sector, land reform and the Directive Principles of State Policy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 10 marks

Analyze the Marxist perspective of the nature of Indian National Movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 nationalism within colonial capitalism → not a pure patriotic awakening

R2 class-capitalism-imperialism lens → Congress read as a class formation

Body flow

Roy: the bourgeoisie initiates, only workers revolutionary → **Dutt**: Congress as a British tool, then bourgeois-led, **Gandhi** as 'mascot' → **Desai**: phasing the movement by its changing class base

Counter-view

Chandra & Sarkar revise the crude reduction → **Gramsci**, hegemony → Gandhian non-violence as strategic mass politics, not pacification

Conclusion routes

R1 valuable for its class analysis, insufficient alone

R2 the strand matured from a crude class lens into a layered analysis of ideology and hegemony

The Marxist perspective analysis the national movement through class, capitalism and imperialism. It views Indian nationalism as a force that emerged within colonial capitalism rather than as a pure patriotic awakening.

M.N. Roy, in *India in Transition* (1922), argued that the bourgeoisie initiated nationalism, while only the working class could be genuinely revolutionary. R.P. Dutt, in *India Today*, saw the congress as initially a tool of British policy and later a bourgeois-led organisation, describing Gandhi as the "mascot of the bourgeoisie".

A.R. Desai followed this by dividing the movement into phases reflecting its changing class base, from the early intelligentsia to peasants, workers and socialists.

Bipin Chandra and Sumit Sarkar, following Gramsci viewed Gandhian non-violence as strategic mass politics and counter hegemony, not mere bourgeois pacification. The perspective remains valuable for its class analysis, though insufficient if used alone.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 20 marks

Discuss the contribution of the Dalit struggle to establish egalitarianism in Indian society during freedom movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 mainstream freedom = political independence → Dalit struggle widens it → social equality becomes the real test of freedom
R2 freedom hollow while caste enslaves → political Swaraj incomplete without social democracy → spine: egalitarianism as the meaning of freedom

Body flow

reformers (**Phule** – Satyashodhak Samaj – education for lower castes / women; **Narayana Guru** – temple reform – 'one caste, one religion, one god') → **Ambedkar's** theory (political democracy without social democracy = contradiction; no nation without fraternity) → **Ambedkar's** action (Mahad Satyagraha 1927 – public water / civic rights; separate electorates – Poona Pact compromise; ILP + Scheduled Castes Federation – organised base) → forces mainstream nationalism to confront untouchability → feeds constitutional safeguards (abolition of untouchability, equality provisions)

Counter-view

Arun Shourie: Ambedkar's stand anti-national → rebutted by **Omvedt:** anti-caste movements more consistently democratic + nationalistic than the elite Congress

Conclusion routes

R1 the Dalit struggle did not reject the nation → it asked the nation to rest on equality + dignity
R2 moved India from Bahishkrit Bharat (exclusion) to Prabuddha Bharat (equality + fraternity)

For most of the national movement, freedom meant political independence from British rule. The Dalit struggle widened this. It insisted that freedom stayed incomplete while many Indians remained socially enslaved by caste.

Its lasting contribution was to make social equality, not just transfer of power, the real test of freedom. The groundwork came from social reformers. Jyotirao Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj attacked Brahmanical hierarchy and opened education to lower castes and women.

Narayana Guru challenged caste exclusion through temple reform and the ideal of "one caste, one religion, one god for mankind". They made the freedom of the excluded a national concern.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar gave this concern its sharpest form. He argued that political democracy without social democracy is contradiction and that no nation can exist without fraternity. His Mahad Satyagraha (1927) asserted equal access to public water and civic rights.

His demand for separate electorates, compromised in the Poona pact, showed how central independent representation has become. The Independent Labour Party and Scheduled Castes Federation gave Dalits an organised political base.

This struggle forced mainstream nationalism to confront untouchability as a national failing and shaped constitutional safeguards such as the abolition of untouchability & equality provisions.

Arun Shourie called Ambedkar's stand anti-national. But according to Gail Omvedt, the anti-caste movements were a more consistently democratic and nationalistic expression of India's democratic revolution than the elite Congress.

The Dalit struggle did not reject the nation; it asked it to rest on equality and dignity. Its contribution was to move India from Bahishkrit Bharat, an India of exclusion, toward Prabuddha Bharat, one built on equality and fraternity.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 10 marks

Write a note on the Dalit perspective of Indian National Movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 movement incomplete without annihilation of caste → political freedom hollow without social freedom

R2 reframes the core question → freedom for whom? nation on what social basis? → caste, not only colonial rule, at stake

Body flow

Phule opens (anti-Brahmanical critique → equality before law over the form of rule) → **Ambedkar** carries it furthest → *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* → Congress neglect of Dalit rights → doubt over upper-caste power-sharing → no nation without fraternity → political democracy needs social democracy → independent political representation

Counter-view

charge of being anti-national vs a widening of nationalism → **Omvedt**: anti-caste movements more consistently democratic than the elite-led Congress

Conclusion routes

R1 Bahishkrit Bharat → Prabuddha Bharat → nationhood resting on equality and dignity

R2 not anti-national but a deeper nationalism → social emancipation as the real test of freedom

The Dalit perspective judged the national movement incomplete so long as caste survived. For its thinkers, freedom from British rule meant little without social freedom for the oppressed at home. The question was not who would rule India, but on what social basis the nation would stand.

Jyotirao Phule opened this line of thought, attacking Brahmanical domination and arguing that equality before law mattered more than the form of government. B.R. Ambedkar carried it further, In What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, he accused the Congress with neglecting Dalit rights and doubted whether upper castes would willingly share power.

For Ambedkar, no nation could exist without fraternity. Political democracy without social democracy was a contradiction and Dalits therefore needed independent political representation.

Far from being anti-national, this critique widened nationalism. Gail Omvedt views the anti-caste movements as more consistently democratic than the elite-led Congress. The Dalit ideal moved from an excluded Bahishkrit Bharat to an enlightened Prabuddha Bharat, resting nationhood on equality and dignity.

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